

**Home In My Opinion GRATITUDE**  
**Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

As I have often pointed out in these columns, Judaism is to be seen not only as a system of laws and commandments but, even more importantly, as a system of values and overriding attitudes. It really is the value system of Judaism that determines the application of the laws and commandments of the Torah. Without a true understanding of the underlying values and attitudes of the holy and eternal Torah, Judaism can often be misinterpreted and even distorted to represent ideas that are in reality antithetical to the Torah itself.

One of the most basic values and attitudes that underlie all Jewish thought and life is that of gratitude...to the creator for implanting within us eternal life, to our parents for having given us physical life, to our employers, and even to the governments that provide for our sustenance and safety. These are the basic components of the Jewish attitude towards life in society.

Gratitude is such a strong and powerful value that it often supplants our own wishes, judgments and perspective on life. It is very hard for human beings to feel gratitude towards parents when they might feel they were unkind or perhaps even abusive. Yet, we certainly can note that the Torah seems to make few, if any exceptions to this overriding value of honoring one's parents, even after they have departed from this world. It is simply a matter of gratitude for the fact that they gave us life, nurtured us when we were helpless, and looked after us when we were unable to make our own way in life. In effect the Torah is teaching us that the two greatest words in the English language are "thank you."

The daily prayers of Judaism are replete with expressions of thanks and gratitude. The fault line in Judaism is when one feels that everything one has gained or achieved physically or spiritually is due solely to one's own efforts and wisdom. That type of hubris and arrogance leads to personal and national destruction, as the Torah itself proclaims.

Often times in life there is a very thin line between the necessary self-confidence and self-worth of a person and unwarranted hubris and arrogance. The Torah wants us to define that line, individually and nationally, and to abide by it under all circumstances and situations. It is only a sense of gratitude that keeps a person from overwhelming pride and unacceptable haughtiness. The Torah emphasizes that even the simplest and most basic physical act that our bodies perform is worthy of note and gratitude to the Creator.

A Jew blesses his Creator at least 100 times per day. This is a constant reminder of the value of gratitude that should dominate one's life and outlook. The tendency of humans is to complain about what we feel is missing and imperfect and to overlook what has been accomplished and achieved. The fact that the glass of life is never quite full, never justifies not appreciating the part of that glass which we can utilize and being grateful for it.

Our generation has been blessed to see events, both personal and national, that were practically undreamt of a half-century ago. I do not understand how one cannot be grateful for living in a time when the Jewish state in the Land of Israel has been miraculously established and successfully taken root. For many Jews, somehow this is not sufficient because of the religious, social and economic shortcomings of the state. Yet, any modicum of a sense of gratitude certainly teaches that we should be inordinately grateful for having seen before our very eyes the fulfillment of many of the predictions of the great prophets of Israel.

We should be grateful that the average lifespan of human beings in much of the Western world and certainly in the State of Israel has increased dramatically in just the past century. Jewish families, who a

few short decades ago could only hope to see grandchildren, now can confidently expect not only to see great-grandchildren but even to participate in their life cycle events.

Those of us who are fortunate enough to live in the city of Jerusalem with its hustle and bustle, traffic jams and crowded streets, should be especially grateful for this gift that the Lord has bestowed upon us in our time. In our prayers we beg the Lord to realize our good intents and not our failed behavior. This is a reciprocal prayer because for it to have meaning the Lord demands, so to speak, that we appreciate and treasure what we have and concentrate much less on what we think we are missing.

Shabbat shalom  
Berel Wein

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**Home Weekly Parsha NASSO**  
**Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

The almost endless repetition of the gifts of the elders of the tribes of Israel, at the time of the dedication of the Tabernacle in the desert, has presented a problem to all the commentators to the Torah over the ages. Why does the Torah, that is often so sparing with words even when discussing important and eternal commandments and issues, allow itself to be so expansive and repetitive in this matter?

As can be imagined, there are numerous discussions of this matter by the scholars of Israel over the centuries, though it is difficult to find an answer that proves to be both emotionally and intellectually satisfying. Even I am loath to tread in areas where even the great angels of Israel have found difficulty, nevertheless there is an observation that I feel can and should be made that does have relevance and importance to us.

Nothing in the Torah should be treated cavalierly. There is a message to all that is written within its holy words and it is incumbent upon us to find and absorb that message in our own lifestyle and society. Often-times in life people are deterred from taking certain actions or developing certain ideas or programs simply because someone has already advanced that idea.

People feel that if they are not the first to propose an idea, if someone, so to speak, has beaten them to the punch, then they withdraw completely from the arena and have nothing to say or contribute to the matter. The repetition of the same identical gifts that each of the 12 elders of the tribes of Israel donated to the Tabernacle teaches us that just because someone else has originally done a great thing, one should not be deterred from repeating that exact same deed.

Often in life, it is the repetition of an act or declaration that solidifies the original pioneering act or statement. It is the fact that others have chosen to imitate and repeat the same act that gives the original act its validity and value. Had there been only one gift of one of the elders of Israel to the Tabernacle, cynics would say that this was merely a formal gesture of public display but did not really reflect the true intent, emotions and relationship of the tribes of Israel towards this holy structure.

It is only when this act is repeated over and over and each of the elders of the tribe of Israel demands its own right and turn to express its appreciation for the godly gift of the Tabernacle to the Jewish people that the true attitude and emotion of the people is honestly and openly reflected.

Throughout the Torah we are aware that there is an underlying idea that people do not want to be excluded from participation in a godly commandment and holy mission. This is abundantly evident in the case of the gifts of the elders of the tribes of Israel as outlined in this week's Torah reading.

Shabbat shalom  
Rabbi Berel Wein

## Lifting Heads (Naso 5778) Covenant & Conversation Judaism & Torah

The word Naso that gives its name to this week's parsha is a verb of an extraordinary range of meanings, among them: to lift, to carry, and to forgive. Here though, and elsewhere in the wilderness years, it is used, in conjunction with the phrase *et rosh* ("the head") to mean "to count." This is an odd way of speaking, because biblical Hebrew is not short of other verbs meaning to count, among them *limnot*, *lispor*, *lifkod*, and *lachshov*. Why then not use one of these verbs? Why not simply say "count" instead of "lift the head"?

The answer takes us into one of the most revolutionary of all Jewish beliefs. If we are each in the image of God, then every one of us has infinite value. We are each unique. Even genetically identical twins share only approximately 50 percent of their attributes. None of us is substitutable for any other. This may well be the single most important consequence of monotheism. Discovering God, singular and alone, our ancestors discovered the human individual, singular and alone.

This was simply not a value in the ancient world, nor is it one in tyrannical or totalitarian societies today. The ruler might be deemed to have infinite value; so might some of the members of his or her court; but certainly not the masses – as the word "mass" itself implies. Most people were simply regarded as part of a mass: an army, a work force or a gang of slaves. What mattered was their total number, not their individual lives, their hopes and fears, their loves and dreams.

That is the image we have of Egypt of the Pharaohs. It is how the sages understood the builders of Babel. They said that if a brick fell from the tower they wept. If a worker fell and died, they paid no attention.[1] Almost a hundred million people died in the twentieth century in Stalin's Russia, Mao's Communist China and Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge. We say of such regimes that people became "just numbers." [2] That is what the Torah is rejecting as a matter of supreme religious principle. At the very moment when one might be maximally tempted to see people as "just numbers" – namely, when taking a census, as here – the Israelites were commanded to "lift people's heads," to raise their spirits, to make them feel they counted as individuals, not numbers in a mass, ciphers in a crowd.

In the course of my life I have had several deep conversations with Christians, and there is one aspect of Judaism that they find very difficult to understand. The conversation usually turns to the central figure of Christianity, and I am often asked, do I believe that he was the son of God. "I do indeed," I reply, "because we believe that every Jew is a son or daughter of God." What Christianity applies to one figure in its faith, we apply to all. Where Christianity transcendentalises, Judaism democratises. My conversation partners often think I am being evasive, finding a polite way to avoid answering the question. In fact, though, the opposite is true.

The first words God commands Moses to say to Pharaoh were, "My child, My firstborn, Israel" (Ex. 4:22). In Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the Israelites, "You are children of the Lord your God" (Deut. 14:1). "Beloved are Israel," said Rabbi Akiva, "for they are called God's children." [3] One of the key phrases of prayer, *Avinu malkenu*, "Our Father, our King," encapsulates this in two simple words. We are all royalty. We are each children of the King.

To be sure, this is not the only metaphor for our relationship with God. He is also our Sovereign and we are His servants. He is our shepherd and we are His sheep. These evoke more humility than the image of parent-and-child. What is more, when God saw the first human without a partner He said, "It is not good for man to be alone." The Torah is thus signalling one of the defining tensions of all human life: we are independent but we are also interdependent. Our thoughts and feelings belong to the "I," but much of our existence depends on being part of a "We." Despite its unprecedented estimate of the individual, Judaism is at the same time an irreducibly communal faith. There is no "I" without the "we."

The Hassidic master Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Przysucha nicely summed up the Jewish approach to the value of a life. He said that we should each have two pockets. In one we should place a piece of paper with the words: "For my sake was the world created." [4] In the other should be the words: "I am but dust and ashes." [5] We are unique. We each have non-negotiable dignity and inalienable rights. But in and of ourselves we are nothing. Our greatness comes not from us but from God. That is the dialectic of life in the conscious presence of our mortality and God's eternity.

The point being made by the Torah, though, is that what matters is not how we see ourselves but how we see, and treat, and behave toward others. The world is not short of self-important people. What it is short of is those who make other people feel important – who "lift their heads."

I will never forget the occasion when Prince Charles, at a banquet given by the Jewish community, spent as much time talking to the young schoolchildren who came to sing in a choir as he did to the great and good among the guests, or when he came to a Jewish primary school and lit Chanukah candles with the children, giving each the chance to tell him who they were and what the festival meant to them. That, at least in Britain, is what royalty is and does. Members of the royal family make other people feel important. That is their work, their service, their role. It is the true meaning of royalty. Watching them, you understand Rabbi Yohanan's fine insight that "greatness is humility." [6] You understand also Ben Zoma's axiom: "Who is honoured? One who honours others." [7]

The challenge that emerges from the way the Torah describes taking a census is that we must "lift people's heads." Never let them feel merely a number. Make those you meet feel important, especially the people whom others tend to take for granted: the waiters at a communal meal; the woman who takes your coat in a cloakroom; the *shammass* in the synagogue; the people doing security duty; the caretaker; the most junior member of the office team, and so on. Make eye contact. Smile. Let them know you do not take them for granted. You appreciate them. They matter as individuals.

For this is the life-changing idea: We are as important as we make other people feel.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

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### Parshat Naso (Numbers 4:21 – 7:89)

#### Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

#### Efrat, Israel – Who was the target audience for the Ten Commandments?

Our Biblical portion this week speaks of the ongoing voice of the Divine, which continues to be heard from within the Sanctuary (*Mishkan*) on a continual basis after the Divine Revelation, which has just been heard by the entire nation at Sinai. It is clear from the text that G-d will be speaking to Moses – and only to Moses – from between the two cherubs. (Numbers 7:89) The revelations that Moses will receive in the Sanctuary would later be communicated to the rest of Israel in the form of the Pentateuch (and perhaps even major principles of the Oral Law) which we have today. This is in contrast to the Ten Commandments (or at least the first two of the Ten Commandments) which – at least according to the majority of our Biblical commentaries – were initially revealed by G-d to the entire Israelite nation at Sinai (Exodus 20:1). It seems rather obvious that the subsequent Sanctuary revelations were targeted specifically to the Jewish people with the necessity of Moses' serving as intermediary; after all, many if not all of those commandments deal with the activities of the Israelites after they enter the promised Land of Israel. But what of the Ten Commandments? Were they initially meant for Israel – or, perhaps, were they, and are they, really meant for the entire world, for all of humanity?

The Midrash certainly seems to think that G-d initially was desirous of making His revelation a universal one, directed at all of civilization. In Moses' farewell message to the Israelites at the conclusion of his earthly life (and at the conclusion of the Pentateuch), he declares: "The Lord came from Sinai and above from Seir to them; He appeared from Mt. Paran..." (Deut 33:2). Rashi (ad loc) cites the Midrash, "He began with the children of Seir (Edom or Esau, and, in the Midrashic tradition, the progenitor of Rome and Christianity), offering that they accept the Torah (of the Decalogue), but they did not desire it, he then went on and offered it to the children of Ishmael (Midrashically, the Arab Moslem world), but they did not want it..." the famous Midrash goes on to describe how the entire world was not yet ready to accept the moral strictness and limitations of "Thou shalt not murder, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not commit adultery," whereas the Israelites declared, "We shall carry out (initially) and (only later attempt to) understand" the laws of the Decalogue, but we now accept them "wholesale" and in their entirety (Exodus 24:7). But in the first instance, according to the Midrash, G-d intended the Ten Commandments for everyone! It is also fascinating to note that even within the Biblical text itself the all-inclusive nature of G-d's revelation seems evident; the introductory verse of the Decalogue reads "And G-d spoke all these words saying..." without any specific object or nation He was addressing (Exodus 20:1), whereas the very previous verse states, "And Moses descended to the nation and spoke to them..." (Ex 19:25). Moses' audience may have been Israel, but G-d's audience was – and is – the world!

And indeed each of the laws of the Decalogue are universally relevant and even critical for the preservation of humanity. The introductory statement, "I am the Lord your G-d who took you out of the Land of Egypt, the house of bondage" refers not only to G-d's concern that Israel be free but also to G-d's concern that every human being – created in the Divine image be free; had G-d only been parochially concerned for the Israelites, He could have air-lifted them out of Egypt as we Israelis airlifted the Beta Yisrael Jewish community out of Ethiopia in Operations Moses and Solomon, and there would have been no necessity for all the ten plagues and the splitting of the Reed Sea. These miracles clearly meant to teach Pharaoh – and all would-be totalitarian, enslaving despots of the future – that G-d demands freedom for each of His children; this lesson was meant to be learned by the entire world, so that the Israelites could justifiably sing at the Reed Sea: "The Nations heard and they became terrified, trembling grabbed hold of the inhabitants of Philistia; the generals of Edom were frightened... all inhabitants of Canaan melted... The Lord (and not any Pharaoh) shall reign forever and ever" (Exodus 15:14-18).

The next two actual commandments prohibit idolatry, which is similarly prohibited by the seven Noahide laws of morality. I strongly subscribe to Rabbi Menahem Meiri's definition of idolatry, which has nothing to do with theology and everything to do with the ethically and morally repugnant sexual orgiastic excesses and child sacrifice – murders associated with idolatry (see Moshe Halbertal's important book, *Idolatry*). The third commandment prohibiting the taking of the Lord's name in vain (or to further falsehood or trickery) parallels the Noahide prohibition of blaspheming G-d; note that nowhere is belief in G-d explicitly mentioned as either one of the Noahide laws or one of the Ten Commandments. This is reminiscent of the trenchant midrashic comment, "Would that you forget Me, says G-d, but remember My laws of morality,"

The fifth commandment deals with respecting parents – who give life and usually sustaining nurture – with the final five forbidding murder, adultery, theft, false testimony and coveting that which does not belong to you. All of these are certainly universal in import and attribution.

The only commandment which may be seen as referring only to the Israelites is the fourth, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy... The seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your G-d; you shall not do any creative physical activity, neither you nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your Gentile manservant nor your Gentile maid-servant, nor your animal, nor the stranger who is within your gates" (Exodus

20:8-10). Here, too, the work prohibition includes the stranger, the Gentile and even the animal, with the very next verse stressing the most universal of reasons for this Sabbath law: "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth and everything which is in them, and He rested on the seventh day" (20:11). Apparently the message of the Sabbath is that there is only one Creator, everyone and everything else is a creature, and so the Sabbath work prohibition comes to remind us to value every Divine creation and for one human being never to "lord" over any other human being – who is a creature just like he is a creature. All humans must together and separately only serve the single and singular Lord of the Universe. This idea is strengthened in second version of the Decalogue in the Book of Deuteronomy which stresses the reason for the Sabbath as being "in order that your male servant and your female servant may rest like you" (Dt. 5:14).

Although it is true that our Sabbath Amidah specifies the fact of the Sabbath as a sign between G-d and Israel forever, a day which G-d "did not give to the Gentiles of the earth but (only) to Israel did He give it with love," this may either refer to the fact that the Gentiles chose not to take it, or that the details of our Sabbath laws and the all-encompassing Divine Service which defines Jewish Sabbath observance does not apply to the Gentile world. But the ever-arching notion of a general day of rest for all creatures under the one Creator may well be necessary and crucial for Gentile as well as Jew.

In any event, the Ten Commandments is probably Judaism's greatest gift to the world, and our best chance at world peace were they ever to be universally adopted. And the fact that we read the Book of the convert Ruth on the Festival commemorating the Revelation at Sinai, is the best proof of the universal import of that revelation!

Shabbat Shalom

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### Naso: Three Priestly Blessings Rav Kook Torah

Birkat Cohanim

Aaron and his descendants, the kohanim, were commanded to bless the Jewish people with three special blessings:

"Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying: This is how you must bless the Israelites. Say to them:

- May God bless you and watch over you.
  - May God's Presence enlighten you and bestow grace to you.
  - May God lift His face toward you and grant you peace."
- (Num. 6:23-26)

The third blessing in particular needs clarification. What does it mean when it says: *הָאֵלֹהִים יִשָּׂא פָנָיו אֵלֶיךָ* - that God will "lift His face toward you"?

The Need for Divine Favor

While the first blessing refers to God's assistance in the material realm, the second blessing speaks of enlightenment and spiritual attainments. Greater enlightenment, however, brings with it greater responsibility. As we grow in knowledge and wisdom, we are expected to display a higher level of moral sensitivity. Our thoughts should be purer, our character traits more refined, and our lives more ethical.

If one takes into account the resulting moral demands, one may become apprehensive and even discouraged. In order to assuage this concern, the kohanim bestow a third blessing: "May God lift His face toward you".

To "lift one's face" is a Hebrew idiom meaning to give special consideration or leniency. The Torah cautions a judge, for example, not to "lift his face" toward one of the litigants (Lev. 19:15). The judge must be careful to avoid giving the impression of favoring one side. The other litigant may feel that the case is already lost and lose heart. The kohanim bless us that, despite the expectations which come with a higher spiritual level, we should not lose heart. God will be lenient, taking into account the physical reality in which we live.

One may, however, feel embarrassed or uneasy with this Divine leniency. Therefore, the final blessing closes with the gift of peace - peace of mind. "And may He grant you peace."

This week's reading includes the mitzvah that we usually call *duchening*, which is a type of prayer that the Torah mandated. This makes it appropriate to discuss the rarely-discussed subtopic: When is a prayer inappropriate?

### For What May I Pray?

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

#### Question #1:

"Rabbi, this is a very unfortunate and painful question. My grandfather is suffering from Alzheimer's disease and no longer recognizes us. Should we continue to pray that he recover?"

#### Question #2:

I received this question as an e-mail:

"Dear Rav: I have an extended family member who is, unfortunately, involved in spreading non-Torah ideas. Recently, he was diagnosed with cancer. May I pray for his recovery, knowing that, if he recovers, he will probably continue to influence people away from Torah?"

#### Question #3:

"I am a baal teshuvah. May I pray that my non-observant family members find their way to Torah?"

#### Introduction:

All three questions revolve around the same halachic issue: The Mishnah (Brachos 54a) and the Gemara (Brachos 60a) rule that one may not recite a prayer in vain. The Mishnah rules that because of this reason, one may not pray for something that has already happened. The Mishnah's example is that someone who hears of a tragedy occurring in a place where he has family should not pray that this tragedy did not affect his family.

What else is included under the heading of a prayer in vain? Does praying for someone to recover from a medical condition that appears to be non-reversible qualify as praying in vain? Am I permitted to pray that something miraculous occur? Analyzing the issues involved not only provides a clear halachic perspective on our daily mitzvah to pray to Hashem, but also clarifies some important hashkafah issues.

#### The Sefer Chassidim

The earliest source that I know of that analyzes these questions is the Sefer Chassidim (#794):

"A person may not pray for something that is impossible under normal circumstances, for, although the Holy One, Blessed is He, could make it happen, one is not permitted to request something that is beyond the natural order of the world. It is therefore forbidden to pray that Hashem perform a miracle that changes the way the world normally functions."

We see that we are not permitted to pray that Hashem perform miracles in order to influence and intervene in human matters. (We should note that some authorities contend that a person who has reached an elevated level of faith is permitted to pray for a miracle to occur, but this subject is beyond the scope of this article.) It would seem to me that that this quote from the Sefer Chassidim will answer our first question. Praying for the recovery of someone suffering from Alzheimer's to the extent described above would qualify according to the Sefer Chassidim as a *tefillas shav*. Similarly, I have been told by highly reliable sources that the Chafetz Chayim did not pray for a *refuah sheleimah* for those smitten by cancer, since, in his day, it was incurable. (Today, when faced with an "incurable" cancer, one may pray that the researchers discover a cure quickly.) I know of great *tzaddikim* who, when asked to pray for people with incurable ailments, pray that Hashem treat the patient with mercy. One may also pray that the person's condition not get worse (see Tosafos, Bechoros 38b s.v. *Vesimaneich*).

We will now examine a different case to see if it is considered a prayer in vain.

Chizkiyahu's prayer

Chizkiyahu, who was one of the most righteous and scholarly kings of all time, was severely ill when Yeshayahu the Prophet visited him. Yeshayahu had been commanded by Hashem to notify Chizkiyahu that he (Chizkiyahu) should inform his household of his final wishes, and that, furthermore, he would also not merit *Olam Haba*. When Chizkiyahu asked why he was being punished so severely, Yeshayahu answered him, "Because you did not marry."

To this, Chizkiyahu responded that he had not married because he knew through *ruach hakodesh* that he would have a son who would be very evil and cause many others to sin. His decision to remain single was completely for the sake of heaven — it was a tremendous personal sacrifice, made expressly to decrease the number of evildoers in the world. Notwithstanding his intention to increase Hashem's honor, Yeshayahu told Chizkiyahu that he had no right to overrule the Torah's commandment (*Nefesh HaChayim* 1:22). Yeshayahu explained that it is not our place to get involved in the secret ways that Hashem runs His world — our job is merely to obey and fulfill His commandments, and let Hashem do what He sees fit.

At this point, Chizkiyahu asked to marry Yeshayahu's daughter, hoping that their combined merits might overturn the Divine decree that Chizkiyahu's child would be evil. To this request, Yeshayahu responded: "It is too late. There is already a Divine decree that you will die."

Chizkiyahu retorted: "Close up your prophecy and be gone! I have a mesorah from my grandfather, David HaMelech, that even if a sharp sword rests upon your neck, it is still not too late to pray" (*Brachos* 10a).

At this point, Chizkiyahu turned to the wall in prayer, and his prayers were heard. He was granted fifteen more years of life (*Melachim II* 20:1-6; *Yeshayah* 38:4).

#### Analysis of the dispute

Chizkiyahu held that the prophecy did not preclude the possibility that his prayer might be successful. Indeed, his prayer was answered. Thus, we can conclude that although one may not pray for something that is clearly miraculous, one may pray for something that defies a prophecy, particularly if the prophecy is about a punishment, and the person may do teshuvah for the sin for which he was to be punished (*Rambam, Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* 10:4).

#### Praying for sinners

At this point, I would like to address the second of our opening questions: May I pray for the recovery of someone who influences people away from Torah? Although this may not seem like something that qualifies as a *tefillas shav*, we will soon see that, indeed, it might be.

To answer this question, I will again turn to a ruling of the Sefer Chassidim (#688):

"One should not pray for the recovery of someone who caused people to sin, and is now ill. The same approach should be followed regarding someone who prevents the community from performing mitzvos. In addition, one should not pray that someone who caused many others to sin do teshuvah, if some of those people [those that he caused to sin] have already died, because the prayer will not help."

The last part of this ruling seems a bit unusual. Why is the halacha whether I may pray for someone dependent upon whether some of the people that he influenced have already died?

The commentaries explain that this ruling of the Sefer Chassidim is based on the following Gemara: *Kol hamachati es harabim, ein maspikin beyado laasos teshuvah*, whoever causes the public to sin is not given any opportunity to do teshuvah (*Yoma* 87a).

The Gemara explains that it is intolerable that the one who caused others to sin reaches *Gan Eden* while those whom he led into transgression languish in *Gehennom*. To avoid this happening, Hashem will not assist someone to do teshuvah, if the person caused the public to transgress.

The Sefer Chassidim rules that as long as all the misguided followers live, Hashem will assist their leader to do teshuvah, since his followers might join him on the proper path. Once some of his followers have died and have arrived in *Gehennom*, Hashem will not assist him to do teshuvah. It is therefore inappropriate at this point to pray that he find his way to Torah, since praying is asking Hashem to

help, and Hashem will not help. However, the Sefer Chassidim adds: "One may pray that he stop causing others to sin."

Only if he qualifies as an intentional sinner

Although the Sefer Chassidim prohibits praying that this evil leader do teshuvah, he attaches an important factor to this decision: "If he is influencing them because he is a shogeig [someone who violates the Torah because of ignorance, error or negligence – that is, he does not realize how grievous a sin he is committing], then one may pray that he recover from his illness." The example that the Sefer Chassidim chooses for someone who is deemed to be shogeig is someone who has no tzadik, no righteous individual, near him to influence him and guide him as to how to return to Torah. "However, if he was reproofed appropriately by a tzadik and ignored the reproof, he is considered to be someone who violates halacha intentionally."

Based on the Sefer Chassidim, we can answer the second question raised above: I have an extended family member, who is, unfortunately, involved in spreading non-Torah ideas. Recently, he was diagnosed with cancer. May I pray for his recovery, knowing that, if he recovers, he will probably continue to influence people away from Torah?

The answer is that if the family member qualifies as a shogeig, I can pray that he recover. If he qualifies as a meizid, one who is sinning intentionally, not only should I not pray that he recover, but, if some of those whom he influenced have died, I may not pray that he do teshuvah, according to the Sefer Chassidim, although this may be permitted according to others. In all instances, I can pray that he stop influencing people in a harmful way.

Praying that my friend do teshuvah

Rav Yonah Landsofer, a great halachic authority and kabbalist of early seventeenth century Prague, was asked the following question: A Jewish resident of Izmir, Turkey, had left the Jewish community and converted to a different religion, taking with him his young son. Could they pray that this apostate do teshuvah and return to Judaism? In his volume of responsa called Shu"t Me'il Tzedakah (#7), Rav Landsofer addresses this issue, first asking whether such a prayer qualifies as a tefillah in vain.

All is from Heaven, except...

The Me'il Tzedakah notes that Hashem declared that everything is under His control except for yiras shamayim, fear of Heaven, which He deliberately chose not to control, so that people could earn reward – otherwise, there would be no reward and punishment in the world. To quote the Gemara:

"It is declared before each child is born whether it will be strong or weak, wise or foolish, wealthy or poor. But, it is not declared whether it will be evil or righteous, because everything is in Hashem's hands except for an individual's fear of heaven (Niddah 16b)."

Thus, the possibility exists that praying that a sinner repent qualifies as a prayer in vain, since Hashem already decided that He would not interfere in man's decisions.

Thus, we need to decide whether requesting that Hashem influence someone to do teshuvah means asking Hashem to do something that He has chosen not to do, which is the definition of a prayer in vain.

Removing one's Free Choice

Notwithstanding the Gemara's statement that it is not predetermined what direction in life a person will choose, the Me'il Tzedakah notes that Hashem may, and indeed does, take away free choice from people when He feels it is necessary. Among the several proofs he rallies to this conclusion is the verse in Mishlei (21:1), "The heart of a king is in the hands of Hashem," which means that a king loses some of his free choice, although he does not realize it. Thus, praying that Hashem influence someone to do teshuvah – even to pray that Hashem take away the person's free choice in the process – does not qualify as a prayer in vain. Certainly, praying that he be exposed to positive influences that would encourage his involvement and return to Judaism does not constitute a tefillah shav. However, this might involve a different halachic issue:

A second reason

Based on this background, the Me'il Tzedakah asks whether praying that someone do teshuvah may not be correct for a different reason. Hashem has chosen to allow man to decide whether he should do good or evil, and my praying for someone to do teshuvah may be interfering with Hashem's realm. He questions whether a person should ask Hashem for matters that do not affect him personally, since this may be getting involved in "the secrets of Hashem." In other words, one should pray for things that affect one's self, but whether someone else merits honoring Hashem is Hashem's domain, and not a place for prayer.

For sure, a person should pray that Hashem help him keep the mitzvos -- we have many such prayers. But, may one pray that someone else do teshuvah?

Rabbi Meir and Beruria

The Me'il Tzedakah notes that this discussion will depend on how we understand the famous dispute between Rabbi Meir and his wife, Beruria.

Some troublemakers in Rabbi Meir's neighborhood were causing him great distress, and Rabbi Meir wanted to pray that they die. His wife, Beruria, said to him: "Why do you feel (that you have a halachic right) to do this? Because the verse (Tehillim 104:35) says 'that chata'im should cease from the world?'" However (noted Beruria), the verse does not say chote'im, which clearly means sinners, but says chata'im, which can be interpreted to mean that which causes sin (that is, their yetzer hora). Furthermore (proceeded Beruria with her lesson), the continuing part of the verse reads, uresha'im od einam, and the evildoers no longer exist -- if the sinners are destroyed, then there is no need for the verse to repeat itself and say that there are no evildoers. Instead, you should pray that they do teshuvah. Indeed, Rabbi Meir prayed for them to do teshuvah, and they repented" (Brachos 10a).

The Me'il Tzedakah contends that the troublemakers disturbing Rabbi Meir did so because they did not know Torah; had they known Torah, they would have behaved differently. In other words, they were not inherently evil, but misinformed. It was, therefore, appropriate to pray that they discover the proper approach to Yiddishkeit, which would help them keep mitzvos. This is not considered a prayer in vain, since the people were inherently sincere, and would have sought to be yirei shamayim, had they known what it was.

The Me'il Tzedakah also offers another possibility to explain why Rabbi Meir could pray that his adversaries do teshuvah, notwithstanding the fact that this takes away their free choice. The reason is because he was praying to help himself – after all, he was suffering from them, and therefore, he was entitled to pray that they do teshuvah to relieve his own suffering. This is not considered mixing into Hashem's affairs, but praying for something that affects me.

Praying for the apostate

Based on this second approach, the Me'il Tzedakah returns to his original question: may one pray that someone who has chosen to live an evil life return to the Jewish fold? The Me'il Tzedakah presents two reasons why one may.

1. A parent may daven for his child to do teshuvah, because the parent suffers greatly; therefore, one is davening to Hashem, asking Him to alleviate one's suffering, which is permitted. Therefore, this apostate's parents could pray for his return.

2. In the case at hand, the apostate had taken his son with him -- a young child who would be raised bereft of contact with the Jewish community. One who feels anguish for the Shechinah because this young child will be raised outside of Yiddishkeit, could pray for the child's return. And if the most obvious way to return this child to Yiddishkeit would be through his father's return, then one may pray that Hashem bring the father back to Yiddishkeit. This is not a prayer in vain, since sometimes Hashem will force someone to do teshuvah -- as explained above.

The eye of a needle

The Me'il Tzedakah then quotes a prayer that he found, which he says was written with tremendous accuracy: The prayer is for a chazzan to say privately prior to leading services on a fast day, similar to the

prayers that our chazzanim recite prior to musaf on Yomim Nora'im. In these prayers, the chazzan notes that even the most stubborn evildoers occasionally feel remorse or doubt about what they are doing. The chazzan then asks Hashem to accept this sense of remorse as if these people are attempting the first steps toward teshuvah. If they are attempting to do teshuvah, then they will merit tremendous Divine assistance to repent, as we are aware from the following, frequently-quoted Midrash.

"Hashem said to Israel: 'My sons, merely open for me an opening to do teshuvah as large as the eye of a needle, and I will expand for you openings wide enough that wagons can drive through'" (Shir Hashirim Rabba 5:2).

The Me'il Tzedakah rallies proof that this is an acceptable prayer from the following Midrash:

"A person who sees a place where an idol was destroyed should recite the brocha: 'She'akar avodas kochavim mei'artzeinu.' He should then add: 'May it be Your will, Hashem Elokeinu, that you uproot it (idolatry) from all places and return the hearts of those who worship it to serve you with a full heart.'"

The Midrash then asks: "Is this not considered praying on behalf of evildoers?" Rabbi Yochanan answered, "There is hope for the greatest sinners."

The Me'il Tzedakah explains this Midrash to mean that even the greatest sinners may be returned to serve Hashem, and that it is always appropriate to pray that someone find his way back to Hashem. Even the apostate who left the Jewish community of Izmir occasionally doubts the correctness of his new path, and one can pray that Hashem view this as a desire to do teshuvah and open the gates for him, helping him in his return.

In conclusion

In conclusion, we see that both the Sefer Chassidim and the Me'il Tzedakah conclude that, under most circumstances, someone who feels grief over the evildoing of certain individuals may pray that Hashem do whatever is necessary to bring them to teshuvah.

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### **Rav Shlomo Aviner**

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample:

Living in the Heart of the Old City of Yerushalayim

Q: Is it forbidden to live in the Old City of Yerushalayim on account of "You shall surely safeguard your soul" (Devarim 4:15, 23:11)?

A: No. It is a Mitzvah. 1. Settling Eretz Yisrael requires Mesirut Nefesh. 2. It is not more dangerous than living elsewhere (I heard that when Ha-Rav Yitzchak Shlomo Zilberman decided to move to the Old City and live on Ma'alot David Street, his brothers-in-law, who were important Torah scholars, brought him to a Din Torah before Ha-Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, for endangering their sister and nieces and nephews. Rav Zilberman said that he is not obligated to appear before Rav Elyashiv since he is not his Rav but rather his father is his Rav. Nonetheless, he agreed to go. During the Din Torah, the brothers-in-law talked at great length about the danger involved in moving there. Rav Elyashiv stopped them in the middle and said: Until you bring a letter from the Police Chief on the Yerushalayim District saying that it is dangerous and forbidden to live there, what you are saying is Lashon Ha-Rav against Yerushalayim!

I also heard that in Shevet 5778, a couple wanted to move into a newly-redeemed house in the Old City next to the Lion's Gate, where no Jews lived, and when Jews move into a new area, Arabs often awaken and riot. They asked Ha-Rav Amiel Sternberg, Rosh Yeshivat Har Ha-Mor, if it is permissible to move there. He answered: It is a personal decision. One who does not move there is not considered a coward, and one who does move there is not considered irrational. It depends on 1. The feelings of the couple. 2. The future plans, i.e. for more families to move into the area when possible).

Olam Ha-Ba for Animals

Q: We had a dog who was loyal and dedicated, and he died. Does he go to Olam Ha-Ba?

A: No. He does not have a soul.

Q: He only existed in this world?

A: Correct. By the way, on a completely different level, there are many Atheists who do not believe in Olam Ha-Ba, and nonetheless display great self-sacrifice to be good and upright in this world, and see it as a value in and of itself.

Religious Zionist Torah Scholars

Q: Why does the Religious Zionist community have fewer Torah scholars than the Charedi community?

A: The Charedi community has existed for 2000 years, while the Religious Zionist community was born, or more precisely, revived, together with the establishment of the State of Israel.

Postpartum Depression

Q: I am depressed after giving birth. I have always been strong.

A: It is natural. It occurs to one in six women. But you should seek professional help. There is a free support program at Hadassah Ein Kerem Hospital.

Ritalin on Shabbat

Q: Is it permissible to take Ritalin on Shabbat in order to Daven and learn properly, or is it forbidden based on the prohibition of taking medicine for an illness on Shabbat?

A: Yes. 1. It is not certain that Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is considered an illness. 2. One suffers greatly without Ritalin. 3. In our day, medicines are not made at home. 4. In our day, medicines are not made by a grinding process. 5. It is proper to be strict and to hide the Ritalin in food on Friday before Shabbat and then eat it on Shabbat.

Kashering and Immersing Utensils

Q: Which does one do first, Kasher a utensil or immerse it in the Mikveh?

A: Kasher it. Otherwise, it is like a person immersing in a Mikveh holding an impure creature (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 121:2 in the name of the Rashbam).

Sleeping Guard

Q: The guard at the entrance to the school fell asleep. Should I wake him up or is it Gezel Sheina (stealing one's sleep)?

A: You certainly wake him up. He is stealing from those paying him and he is endangering people. Waking him is also for his own good.

Cutting the Line in the Bank

Q: Can a person who is waiting in line at the bank have his friend join him when it is his turn, and let the friend also perform a transaction?

A: No. He helps his friend but at the expense of others (Baba Metzia 8a).

Finding Money on Shabbat

Q: I found money on Shabbat, gave into temptation and took it. I deeply regret it. What can I do?

A: Accept upon yourself not to do it again and give the money to Tzedakah.

Kosher Cheeseburger?!

Question: I heard that the OU gave Kosher certification to a "Cheeseburger", which contains no dairy and no meat, but rather is made from water, wheat protein, potato protein and coconut oil. Isn't there a problem of "Ma'arit Ayin" (the appearance of violating the prohibition) of eating meat and dairy together?

Answer: It is permissible for two reasons:

1. It is true that our Sages decreed that one may not eat almond milk with meat unless one leaves the almonds out for everyone to see (Rama, Yoreh Deah 87:3). Today, in many health circles, almond milk is common. It's in most supermarkets these days (but one wouldn't notice if not looking for it). Also, there are people who

routinely use almond (or rice or soya) milk as a Parve milk substitute or because they are allergic or sensitive to milk.

Similarly, today everyone has seen and knows about veggie burgers. There is therefore no problem of "Ma'arit Ayin" of eating a veggie burger with cheese.

2. We do not make new decrees. That which our Sages decreed is decreed, and that which our Sages did not decree is not decreed. They did not make a decree against eating Parve burgers with Parve cheese. Perhaps you will say that they did not make a decree because such a thing did not exist at their time, but it is included in the original decrees of "Ma'arit Ayin." The halachic authorities explain that we do not make such an argument and it is not included.

I remember when I was a little kid and they invented Parve margarine. People ate the margarine with meat and other people did not know what it was. Many people were strict and put the wrapper on the table. There is also non-dairy creamer which looks like milk. There is a responsum of Ha-Rav Ovadiah Yosef in Shut Yechaveh Da'at (3:59) which permits these items because they are well publicized and everyone knows about them.

Perhaps because this Parve "cheeseburger" new, one such make a clear sign that it is completely Parve.

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### **Rabbi Benjamin Yudin** **You Can It with You**

The Ponevezher Rav z"tl after the Shoah, started Yeshivos for the many orphans and called them Batei Avos as he was looking to raise a new generation of fathers. Once, when visiting the boys, he asked if anyone knew a reason for the custom of reciting at the end of Shemoneh Esrei a verse from Tanach wherein the opening letter of the verse is the first letter of one's name, and the last letter of the verse is the last letter of one's name[1]. The Ponevezher Rav z"tl suggested the following answer:

After 120 years when one is brought before the Divine throne of glory, one is going to forget their name. The fright is so great, as Abba Kohen Bardela taught (Bereishis Rabbah 93:10) that just as the brothers could not answer Yosef (Bereishis 45:3) because they were shocked to find that it was him before them, even more so when one will have to answer to Hashem he will not be able to reply. The Ponevezher Rav explained that the one thing you do take with you to the next world is the Torah and mitzvos that one studied and performed in this world. The recitation of one's name thrice daily in a passuk will accompany that individual (since reciting the passuk constitutes an act of learning Torah) and will remind him of his name.

The concept that one's spiritual wealth that they amassed in one's lifetime is the only possession one takes to the next world is found explicitly in Parshas Nasso according to the Chofetz Chaim. The Torah states, "ish es kadashav lo yehiyeh - a man's holies shall be his, what a person gives to the Kohen shall be his" (Bamidbar 5:10.) All of one's material acquisitions are by nature transient and temporary, as the saying goes: there are no pockets in tachrichim (burial shrouds.)

This is found clearly in Talmud (Bava Basra 11a) regarding King Munbaz, who according to Rashi was the son of Queen Helena, one of the Hasmonean Kings. We are taught that during years of famine he opened his storehouses and treasuries and supported the poor. He was severely criticized by family members because unlike the royalty before him that added to the family fortune, he was depleting the family fortune. He answered with three points: 1. My fathers hoarded wealth below, on Earth, while I have hoarded wealth above, in Heaven 2. My family gathered wealth in an insecure place, and I have accumulated wealth in a most secure environment 3. My forefathers stored something that does not produce fruits, but I have hoarded something that does produce fruit.

Moreover, this concept is explicitly taught in Avos (6:9) by Reb Yosi ben Kismah in explaining why he refused a lucrative rabbinic position in a not yet religious community. As part of his rejection, he explained that, "when a man departs from this world, neither silver, nor gold, nor precious stones, nor pearls escort him, but only Torah study, and good deeds, as it is said, (Proverbs 6:22) 'when you walk it shall guide you, when you lie down, it shall guard you, and when you are awake, it

shall speak on your behalf.' When you walk it shall guide you in this world, when you lie down it shall guard you in the grave, and when you awake it shall speak on your behalf in the world to come."

The Chofetz Chaim z"l presented the following parable in the name of our Sages: a man had 3 friends, the first he was closest with, loved him, and thought the feelings were mutual. The second he also considered close, but not like the first. The third he had associations with, but not as strong as his connections to the others. One day the man was summoned suddenly to the king. He was not told the reason for his urgent appearance before the king, but he was exceedingly frightened to go alone. He asked his first and closest friend to accompany him and to his great surprise, he was refused. The second closest friend agreed to go, but only to the palace gates. In desperation he approached the third friend, and much to his surprise he not only agreed willingly and cheerfully to accompany him to the king but agreed to vouch for and present a most complimentary presentation on his behalf before the king.

The meaning of the above is obvious. The fortune and all material possessions that one invests time and effort amassing are too often that first friend - they flatly refuse to accompany a person to the next world. The second friend is representative of one's family - they tearfully can only accompany a person until the grave. However, that last friend, whom he did not realize how loyal he is, is his Torah study, mitzvos, and good deeds, which excitedly accompany you and endorse on your behalf.

Finally, I'd like to suggest that this is further communicated by King David, (Tehillim 139:5), "achor vakedem tzartani - back and front have you formed me." The Radak understands kedem - back, to refer to the formation of the embryo in the mother's womb. The Talmud (Niddah 30b) teaches that the baby in utero is taught Torah. The neshama of man is surrounded by Torah prior to birth, and the many sources cited above affirm that the soul is protected by Torah in the next world. It is thus understood that the Talmud (Pesachim 54a) lists Torah as the first of the seven supernatural phenomena created prior to this world, as it truly is beyond this world in every sense of the word.

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[1] This practice is found in Sefer Ha'Kavanot Ha'ari, it is said to be helpful in preventing chibut ha'kever, is attributed to the Kitzur Shelah, and is found in the Aruch HaShulchan (Orach Chaim 122:8).

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### **Parshat Nasso** **by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - [www.seasonsofthemoon.com](http://www.seasonsofthemoon.com)**

#### Overview

The Torah assigns the exact Mishkan-related tasks to be performed by the families of Gershon, Kehat, and Merari, the sons of Levi. A census reveals that over 8,000 men are ready for such service. All those ritually impure are to be sent out of the encampments. If a person, after having sworn in court to the contrary, confesses that he wrongfully retained his neighbors property, he has to pay an additional fifth of the base-price of the object and bring a guilt offering as atonement. If the claimant has already passed away without heirs, the payments are made to a kohen. In certain circumstances, a husband who suspects that his wife had been unfaithful brings her to the Temple. A kohen prepares a drink of water mixed with dust from the Temple floor and a special ink that was used for inscribing G-d's Name on a piece of parchment. If she is innocent, the potion does not harm her; rather it brings a blessing of children. If she is guilty, she suffers a supernatural death. A Nazir is one who vows to dedicate himself to G-d for a specific period of time. He must abstain from all grape products, grow his hair and avoid contact with corpses. At the end of this period he shaves his head and brings special offerings. The kohanim are commanded to bless the people. The Mishkan is completed and dedicated on the first day of Nissan in the second year after the Exodus. The prince of each tribe makes a communal gift to help transport the Mishkan, as well as donating identical individual gifts of gold, silver, animal and meal offerings.

#### Insights

##### The Eye of the Beholder

"...May G-d illuminate His countenance for you and be gracious to you." (13:17)

One of the phenomena of the twentieth century that defies complete understanding is The Beatles.

Granted, they had two outstanding composers and a third who was pretty good. They were prolific, writing around 300 songs. It's true that Schubert wrote over 800 tunes, but only about a hundred are truly memorable. Mozart comes close to that, but you have to wait a long time until you get to someone who wrote so many good tunes. The "mop-tops" were all appealing, thin, and full of youthful enthusiasm. And they were witty and iconoclastic. But nothing really can explain their huge success.

In this week's Torah portion we find the blessing of the Kohen. The second stanza reads:

"May G-d illuminate His countenance for you and be gracious to you."

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If G-d illuminates His countenance for me, isn't that the same as being gracious?

The word "gracious" in Hebrew here is *chen*. When Yosef was imprisoned in Egypt, the Torah says, "...and He endowed him with charisma, and He put favor in the eyes of the prison warden (Ber. 39:21) *Chen* in this verse is again translated as "favor".

The message is the same in both verses. You can have bags and bags of charisma, but you'll only ever be a legend in your own lunchtime if G-d gives you favor in the eyes of man.

You can be a lovable mop-top, a great songsmith and cute as a button, but to be a musical and sociological phenomenon — that only the Master of the World can grant.

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לע"נ

שרה משה בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה